

THE CASE

FOR

CAMBRIDGESHIRE

1960

The purpose of this document is to explain briefly to the public the main grounds on which the Cambridgeshire County Council objects to the Local Government Commission's draft proposals for this area.

Shire Hall,
CAMBRIDGE.

June, 1960.

THE CASE FOR CAMBRIDGESHIRE

1. In Cambridge the local authority for some purposes (such as Housing, Police and Refuse Collection) is the City Corporation, and the cost of these services falls upon the City ratepayers only; for other purposes (such as Education, Planning, and Main Roads) the authority is the County Council, and the cost of these services falls alike on the ratepayers of the City and of the villages. The Local Government Commission has recommended that Cambridge City should become a County Borough, that is to say that it should become the only authority for all services within the City, so that it would cease to be part of the administrative County. The County Council believes that this separation of the City from the rural area would be a bad thing for the County as a whole and it therefore urges that the City should remain as it is, part of Cambridgeshire.

2. At present Cambridgeshire is an effective and convenient unit of local government. The Commission has found no fault with the services provided by the County Council. Cambridge is the natural and convenient centre for administration; all the markets, the shops and offices, the schools and hospitals, and professional services are in Cambridge. All roads lead to Cambridge: Cambridge is where everyone from the country meets. Everyday some 30,000 people come into Cambridge from the surrounding area. The motor vehicle has blurred the old distinction between town and country: the townsman spends his weekend and summer evenings in the country, and the countryman comes to town for work and his wife comes for shopping. Urban amenities are becoming available for the remotest village, and the pleasures of the countryside are now accessible to every townsman. No town, least of all Cambridge, is to-day an island by itself, in the sense that many towns were in 1888, when county boroughs were first created. Cambridge owes its prosperity very largely to the offices and shops, the banks and administrative buildings which are located in Cambridge, but which are largely supported (some entirely supported) by those who live in the rural area round Cambridge.

3. The interdependence of the City and the villages is greater to-day than it has ever been before; and this mixing of town and country will go on growing as car ownership grows and the habit of living in the villages increases. Transport and Roads, Health and Hospitals, Education, Location of Industry, Housing and "Overspill" are all services which must be centred on Cambridge and must be planned from the centre for the benefit alike of town and country. The villages need the talent and leadership and financial stability which the City gives, and the City needs the country roads and the co-operation of the village authorities, who increasingly accommodate city dwellers in their midst. It would surely be folly in the face of this growing interdependence to take the City out of the County and set it up as an entirely separate local government unit, whose influence and authority would end abruptly at the City boundary.

4. Why, then, has the Commission recommended that Cambridge should become a county borough? They give three reasons: (1) that relations between the Corporation and the County Council are strained to a degree that is bad for local government; (2) that this strain is inherent in the lack of balance between the City and the rural area, and (3) that the population of Cambridge will reach 100,000 within the next few years, a level that is presumed to be sufficient for the discharge of the functions of a county borough. The Commission does not support these assertions by any evidence; it is difficult therefore to know exactly what is the case to be answered.

5. With regard to friction between the County Council and the Corporation, the County Council regards this charge as entirely frivolous, when set against the consequences of county borough status to the rest of the County. About Planning there has been disagreement; but in other departments (e.g. Education) the City itself admits that the matters in dispute are trivial. The disagreement about Planning arises out of the Holford Plan for the City. The Corporation and the County Council jointly appointed Sir William Holford to prepare a plan for the City. The City Council rejected the Holford Plan; but the County submitted the plan to the Minister, and the Minister approved of it, notwith-

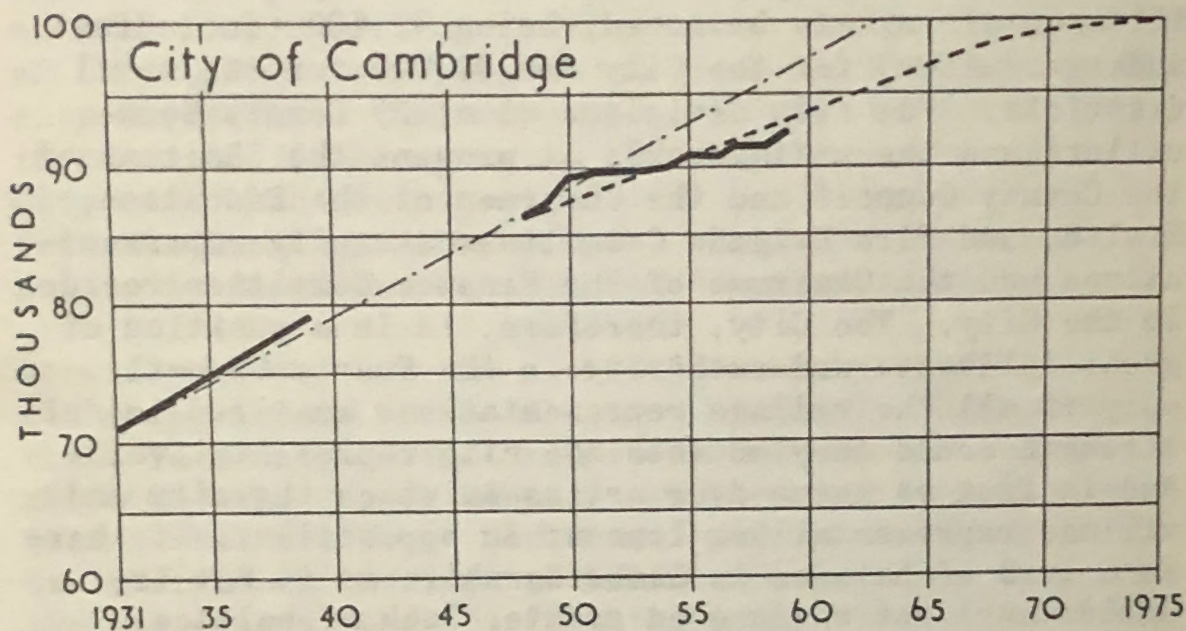
standing the City's strenuous opposition during a very lengthy public inquiry. The Minister's approval of the plan would surely justify the County Council's disagreement with the City on this matter. Disagreements on development control have been very few and on very minor points, and in any case the City will take over Development Control by delegation after August 1st, 1960.

6. The argument about lack of balance in Cambridgeshire is odd. The populations of the City and the villages are nicely balanced, being 92,000 (including undergraduates) for the City and 90,000 for the rural districts. The city divisions elect 23 County Councillors and the villages 29: at present the Chairman of the County Council and the Chairmen of the Education, Health, and Fire Brigade Committees are city representatives and the Chairman of the Finance Committee resides in the City. The City, therefore, is in a position of great influence and authority in the County Council: only if all the village representatives mustered in full strength could they outvote the city representatives and in fact no issue ever arises in which the city and village representatives line up in opposition. If there is a lack of balance in Cambridgeshire as it now is, would there not be an even greater lack of balance between Peterborough and the new County proposed by the Commission?

7. With regard to population, it is extremely unlikely that the City's population will reach 100,000 within the next few years. The diagram overleaf shows that the City's population may well settle down at a figure below 100,000. And this includes some 8,500 university students and some 3,500 occupants of institutions in the City. Even if Cambridge attained the 100,000 mark in the next 15 years, the true resident population would still be less than 90,000.

8. In any case, it would be wrong to make too much of this vexed figure of 100,000. This figure is significant only "insofar as the question of the constitution of a County Borough is affected by considerations of population". It is intended to show that the City Council's own evidence does not support the claim for county borough status, even if its population were 200,000.

It is necessary for the Commission to show that the change is on balance desirable "regard being had not only to the circumstances of the area of the proposed County Borough, but also to those of the remaining parts of the County" and "that it would contribute to making local government more effective and more convenient." This the Commission has not done: it may be assumed, therefore, that they have accepted the evidence of the City Council.



Population Changes

Estimated total civilian population
 1931-1951 trends
 Development Plan provision
 Data for war years omitted as trend was masked by evacuation and call-up

9. The City Council puts forward three general grounds for its claim to be a county borough: firstly that this is the third time of asking - but this has nothing to do with more convenient and more effective local government. Secondly, that other county towns such as Carlisle, Exeter, Ipswich, Lincoln, Norwich, Northampton and Worcester are county boroughs. But the Commission has already proposed to take away county borough status from Worcester. The seeming anomaly of Cambridge's position

may well be resolved by "demoting" some of these county towns.

10. The third ground is a financial one, and at first sight appears to be one of some substance. Cambridge, so runs the argument, contains 70% of the County's rateable value and therefore contributes 70% of the rate-borne cost of county services, such as main roads. There are many more miles of main road in rural Cambridgeshire than in urban Cambridge, so that only a small part of the City's rates is actually spent in Cambridge. Whereas if Cambridge were a county borough, the cost of only the roads within the City would have to be paid for by the city ratepayers.

11. This is true; but is it really so unfair as it at first seems? The reason why the rateable value of Cambridge is disproportionately high is that about half of it arises from national, regional and county activities. In other words, about half of the City's contribution to the cost of county services is paid, not by the City's householders, but by the shops, schools, offices, theatres and cinemas, colleges and hospitals which owe their rateable value as much to the people who come into the City from the rural districts as to the people of Cambridge City. Those rateable resources belong as much to the villages as they do to the City, and it would be wrong if they did not contribute to the rural as well as to the urban services. Indeed, it could be argued that the villagers are indirectly subsidizing the urban ratepayers, since the city ratepayers enjoy the exclusive benefit of this rateable value for Housing, Sewerage, Street Lighting, and the other services provided by the Corporation. It would be entirely wrong to let the City monopolise the rateable value of the shops and offices of central Cambridge; the centre of Cambridge is as much the heart of the villages as it is the heart of the city: it is the heart which serves the whole county.

12. In addition to these three general reasons the City puts forward seven special reasons why Cambridge should be made a county borough. The first two refer to the City's long history and to its position as the seat of the University. These are indeed special circumstances, but they have no bearing whatever on the question

of whether it is desirable in the interests of more effective and more convenient local government that Cambridge should become a county borough. The fifth special circumstance put forward is that the City's record of local government has been one of competence and initiative. But that surely is to be expected; it is a normal rather than a special circumstance. The sixth special circumstance is that the grant of the style and dignity of a City in 1951 is an entitlement for county borough status. But county borough status is not a reward of merit, like a knighthood or a barony: it is something very much more important, namely a redistribution of local government functions and financial resources.

13. So far, then, we have three special circumstances which are beside the point, and one which is in no way special. The remaining three circumstances pleaded by the City Council are very much to the point and quite outstandingly special to Cambridge; but these are the very circumstances which make it most undesirable to make Cambridge a county borough. These three special circumstances are firstly that Cambridge is "a market and shopping centre for a surrounding rural area"; secondly that Cambridge is "a convenient centre for the headquarters of regional organisations, both statutory and voluntary"; and thirdly that Cambridge has a rateable value per head of about £18, while the remainder of the County has a rateable value per head of only about £8.

14. The first two statements emphasise the County Council's contention that Cambridge City is largely dependent on the surrounding rural area. And as for the disparity between the rateable values per head, this of course is due to Cambridge's special position as the heart of the County. The rateable value of rural Cambridge is abnormally low because a large part of the property values created by the villagers is situated in Cambridge City. The rateable value of the City is high because much of it is derived from the activities of those who live outside the City boundary. In the words of the City Council, "the fact that Cambridge has been the financial support of the County Council for a long period of years speaks for itself". Indeed it does,

but in a sense directly opposite to that which the City Council had in mind.

15. But far more serious than any consideration of financial gain or loss would be the effect of making Cambridge a county borough on the rest of the County. Having taken out Cambridge City by creating it a county borough, the Commission proposes to join the Cambridgeshire villages to Huntingdon, the Isle of Ely, the Soke of Peterborough, together with Royston and bits of Northampton and Rutland to make a vast new County more than 55 miles from north to south. This nameless agglomeration would have no natural or convenient centre: it would lack common tradition and loyalty and it would be without any community of interest. Its Council would be a meeting of strangers without knowledge of each others' territories and problems. With the main centres of population round the periphery, the long distances would make the administration expensive and desperately inconvenient to officials, councillors and to the public generally. This monstrous hybrid is not wanted by anyone, except, curiously enough, by the City Corporation who expect to be excluded from it. What conceivable advantage could this new County be to any of its inhabitants?

16. To the Cambridgeshire villages this new County would be a shattering disaster. They would almost certainly be asked to transfer their loyalty to Peterborough; to look to Peterborough for their schooling, their health services, and their roads; and to go to Peterborough when county officials have to be seen. What sort of service could the Cambridgeshire villages expect to get from Peterborough, 40 miles over the fen? It would be the end of Cambridgeshire as a county: the Cambridgeshire villages with their long traditional ties to Cambridge City would find themselves sunk in a nameless county of strangers. Could this change possibly make local government better for the Cambridgeshire villages?

17. To this question the Commission gives no answer. An enormous burden of proof lies upon those who propose this upheaval of administration and break-up of tradition to show that the change would bring immense benefits to

to all the inhabitants concerned. The Commission has made no attempt to discharge this burden. They have made no criticism of the services provided by the Cambridgeshire County Council. Their proposals would disrupt these present services and destroy the County of Cambridge. At a time when so much in local government is crying out to be done, it is wholly wrong to break up the existing machinery unless it can be shown convincingly that the present machinery has failed to work and that what is proposed would certainly work a great deal more conveniently and more effectively.

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